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PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #0340/01 1661622
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 151622Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3750
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 CONAKRY 000340

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/03/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PMIL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: GUINEA POST-COUP: AN ANALYSIS AND POLICY
DISCUSSION, PART I

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES ELIZABETH RASPOLIC FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (S) As we approach the six-month anniversary of the December 23 coup d'etat, it is a good time to step back and assess Guinea's evolution under the leadership of CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara, and to discuss where the country might be headed over the coming year. The below analysis reflects the thinking of the Embassy's reporting team. It is by no means exhaustive, but will hopefully serve as a useful point of departure as we consider the way forward in terms of our bilateral relationship and policy. This first part looks at the political and social context and then outlines what might be ahead in the months to come. The second cable (septel) discusses the subsequent policy implications.

SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS

--THE GOVERNMENT--

¶2. (S) Despite the CNDD's repeated statements to the contrary, government actions to date suggest that the CNDD has a long-term agenda that does not include relinquishing power, although they may eventually agree to step aside and move into an "advisory" role in a post-election environment. In the meantime, it is increasingly evident that elections are unlikely to materialize before the end of the year. The honeymoon period is drawing to a close and long-standing, unresolved economic and social complaints are once again beginning to rear their heads. Many government operations, which were only borderline functional before, have come to a screeching halt while other newly defined operations are going forward at full speed without respect for rule of law.

¶3. (S) The country is governed by a core group of young military officers who are largely unqualified for the jobs they have taken on. CNDD President Moussa Dadis Camara is the man in front for the time being, but available information suggests that members of his entourage may be pulling the strings. Dadis himself is erratic and increasingly dictatorial. Indications of corruption have already begun to emerge around some of his closest advisors while other key ministers pursue problematic policies that challenge basic human rights principles.

--THE MILITARY--

¶4. (S) The Guinean Armed Forces (GAF) have been a growing problem for years, but especially since the May 2008 military mutiny. The GAF is undisciplined, unprofessional, and grossly overstaffed. The previous government consistently acceded to military demands, not necessarily because Lansana Conte was a military general himself, but because civilian bureaucrats had no idea how to control the GAF, and were

afraid of the consequences of attempting to interfere in military matters. The military is Guinea's strongest national institution, and as such, it is no surprise that its officers are now running the country. It should also therefore be no surprise that these officers are unlikely to quietly fade into the background just because civilian officials are elected.

--THE POPULATION--

15. (S) At the same time, Dadis and the CNDD enjoy significant popular support, although support for Dadis appears to be waning. Despite the recent anti-Dadis sentiment, there is a tacit acceptance of, if not advocacy for, the need for a military-managed transition period. The people have welcomed Dadis' crusade to "sanitize" the system, and many seem to think that the CNDD should take as long as he needs to accomplish that goal. People do want elections, but they are in no hurry to head to the polls.

16. (S) Civil society organizations, labor unions and political parties (Les Forces Vives) have been unable to mount an effective civilian counterforce to the junta. Crippled by infighting and mutual distrust, these groups remain divided over political strategies and goals. They all want elections, but they can't agree on when they should be held or what needs to be done first. As they begin to realize that the current leadership may be settling in for the long haul, individuals seem to be looking more and more to advance their individual interests, at the expense of the common good.

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17. (S) Within civil society, Guinea's youths (aged 15 to 40) represent the single-most powerful, potential voice for change. There is a generational shift in progress as Guinea moves away from the old leadership, which came of age during the Sekou Toure era. Although literacy and education remain a problem, the internet has revolutionized many young people's access to information. There are core groups of young intellectuals who are eager for change, well informed of what is happening both in Guinea and the outside world, and are willing to put their lives at risk. Largely unemployed and unattached, these young people have little to lose. At the same time, they are extremely vulnerable to manipulation, and lack cohesion amongst themselves. Political leaders, including former President Conte and the new CNDD leadership, have successfully used cash to buy support from one youth group or another. Guinea's young people have been unable to pull together in a meaningful way to date, but if they could, they represent the best chance for a grassroots, pro-democracy movement.

--DEMOCRACY AS THE UNKNOWN--

18. (S) In some ways, Guinea has become marginally more stable since the coup. Before Conte's death, people were anticipating a transition, but that transition was undefined, and people were afraid of what might develop. Now that the initial scramble for power has been peacefully overcome, people can see the shape of the transition and are largely comfortable with it. In the same way, the prospect of elections may be frightening. No one knows who might win the election and what kind of power structure might emerge as a result. This political unknown is particularly frightening to many because of the ethnocentric nature of the political parties. In the past, Guineans have proven to be extremely conflict adverse. As such, they seem to be in no hurry to rush towards another undefined transition. The current system is one that they know well - despite its many flaws, citizens know how to work that system. For many, democracy represents the unknown.

--REGIONAL STABILITY--

¶9. (S) When looking at the political situation in Guinea and the USG policy response, it is also important to step back and look at the question of regional stability. Guinea has long been one of the most politically stable countries in a region devastated by civil conflicts. Towards the end of the Conte regime, ECOWAS nations and other international partners started watching Guinea closely, concerned that the country would fall apart and subsequently cause the rest of the region to destabilize. If Guinea were to implode, it is likely that its immediate neighbors would experience some spillover effects given how big and well equipped the Guinean military is. This perspective is important to keep in mind especially when looking at how ECOWAS countries may be formulating their foreign policies towards Guinea. As mentioned above, some might argue that the installation of the military junta has actually brought Guinea more stability. Like some Guineans, ECOWAS neighbors may also be unwilling to push quickly for another transition. Senegal's approach has been inconsistent with that of ECOWAS since the beginning, and we are already beginning to see indications of the same out of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

--THE ECONOMY--

¶10. (S) On the economic front, much of the population lives on less than \$1 a day and lacks regular access to electricity and clean water. The GoG is facing a significant budget crunch in the face of declining mining revenues and mounting debt service payments. Despite this "official" lack of national funds, the CNDD seems to be able to put their hands on large stacks of cash whenever they need it. The GoG continues to meet its debt obligations and pay government salaries, but most ministries lack operational funds. Recent and pending economic policy decisions on the part of the CNDD may have devastating long-term effects. Contacts within the international community have said that the GoG may be approaching a financial crisis point. We have yet to see it materialize, but it may be looming on the horizon.

PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICANS

¶11. (S) The United States continues to be viewed favorably by most Guineans despite having taken what many Guineans view as a unrealistic and unfair policy position in reaction to

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the coup. During routine meetings, Guinean contacts will often mention their appreciation of the USG's assistance during the Liberian and Sierra Leonian civil wars. At that time, the USG provided highly valued military training to elite Guinean forces, commonly called "Rangers." These forces were instrumental in Guinea's successful repulsion of neighboring rebel forces from Guinean territory. Bilateral relations aside, Guineans generally like Americans and have great respect for the United States and its democracy. At the same time, as the economic and political situation deteriorates and our policy position remains constant, these sentiments could quickly change. There is already a perception that the USG is abandoning Guinea in its hour of need. If the situation worsens, this perception could become stronger.

THE ROAD AHEAD

¶12. (S) Given these realities, it seems that there are several possible scenarios before us, which are not mutually exclusive:

--DELAYED ELECTIONS--

¶13. (S) The only groups currently pushing for elections

before the end of 2009 are the international community and its International Contact Group on Guinea (ICG-G), and political parties. Most everyone else agrees that elections are critical, but are not committed to a short timeline. They are more focused on a broader transition agenda that includes everything from constitutional and electoral code reform to support for Dadis' crusade to "sanitize" the government. Dadis and the CNDD have publicly committed to holding legislative elections in October and presidential elections in December, but few people seem to believe that the elections will actually take place.

¶14. (S) The GoG is already off schedule in terms of the election timeline proposed by Les Force Vives. Technical difficulties persist. The voter registration campaign is incomplete and people are beginning to challenge its accuracy. The rainy season is upon us, which will severely limit electoral preparations through early September, at which point, the month-long observation of Ramadan will commence. In addition, longstanding financial challenges have not been resolved. Time is short, political will is questionable, and there is much to be done. Despite these obstacles, the donor community remains convinced that it is still technically possible to hold elections before the end of the year.

¶15. (S) These factors indicate that it is increasingly likely that the GoG will push presidential elections into 2010, and probably legislative elections as well. Some contacts have reported that members of the CNDD are seeking to push elections to the end of 2010, a full two years after the coup. Within the civilian sector, there currently seems to be some support for this plan. However, most contacts have emphasized that they would be unwilling to accept a transition period that lasts more than two years. There is also a good chance that even if the country organizes legislative elections in 2009 or 2010, there may be a significant delay between legislative and presidential elections, which would ultimately prolong the CNDD's control over the state.

¶16. (S) Information from other contacts indicates that members of the CNDD may be actively strategizing as to how they can permanently maintain their grip on power. Despite the stated commitments of Les Forces Vives, the CNDD may very well end up doing so with the tacit support of the population, eventually legitimized through elections. Many Guineans generally do not trust the system in place, nor the potential political candidates. If the CNDD is able to start addressing basic needs, such as electricity and water, the population may be willing to let them stay. The Conte regime started out much the same way and people eventually accepted the "transition" as the new republic. Through apathy and lack of cohesion, Guinea may ultimately slouch towards a "third" republic with the CNDD at the helm.

--POPULAR DISCONTENT/CIVIL UNREST--

¶17. (S) As it becomes clear to the population that the transition is likely to slide into 2010, the potential for civil unrest is likely to increase. Following in the footsteps of former GoG leaders, Dadis is already making

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grandiose promises to the population, such as those for better access to water and electricity, and an improved security environment. And like his predecessors, Dadis is going to find it very difficult to fulfill these promises due to the country's bureaucratic and fiscal reality. If frustrations mount, people may decide to take to the streets in protest.

¶18. (S) The prompt settlement of the recent taxi strike indicates that Dadis has started down a similarly dangerous path. Towards the end of the Conte regime, group after group of supplicants lined up to demand that their concerns, most

of which were primarily financial, were addressed. The GoG responded by throwing cash at them along with promises for long-term solutions. Dadis essentially did the same thing with the taxi drivers, and the next groups are already starting to line up. If Dadis is unable to deliver long-term solutions or a satisfactory amount of cash, he may face labor strikes or public protests, which often turn violent.

¶19. (S) Civil unrest is nothing new in Guinea. There is a possibility that widespread popular discontent could lead to a nationwide movement such as that of early 2007, but it is more likely that we will see sporadic, short-lived demonstrations as different groups independently seek to advance their own interests. Guineans are very sensitive to the fact that more than 100 people were killed in 2007 by the same military that is now running the country. For them to risk those casualties again, there would need to be a nationwide movement with a clearly defined goal. To date, such a goal has not been articulated, and even when things continued to deteriorate under Conte, civil society leaders were not able to effectively organize themselves. At the same time, it would be dangerous to discount the possibility of a spontaneous uprising that quickly evolves into a more organized mass movement. Either way, we expect to see more unrest.

--COUNTER-COUP--

¶20. (S) The CNDD is divided within itself and its membership seems to change daily. Indeed, it is difficult to even get a clear reading on just who is on the CNDD. Some CNDD members support the idea of a relatively short transition leading to elections, but others seem to be actively strategizing as to how they can permanently maintain their hold on power. Dadis is caught in the middle and is in way over his head. Available information suggests that although he is the central authority, he is not a real decision maker. Rather, it seems that he relies heavily on his circle of advisors, particularly Sekouba Konate (Vice President and Minister of Defense), who may often give him conflicting advice. If Dadis starts to look like he is moving towards elections as he says he is going to do, those with a more permanent agenda in mind might start thinking about bringing in someone else to head the CNDD.

¶21. (S) In addition, Dadis' erratic behavior and the embarrassingly public dressingdown he has given some of his ministers, including generals who were previously his superiors, may encourage sedition. It has been said that Dadis is president simply because he made it to the microphone first. Embassy has begun to hear indications of a possible counter-coup movement, which suggests that this potential scenario is becoming more plausible.

LOOKING AHEAD

¶22. (S) The above discussion highlights the continued uncertainty of Guinea's political transition. There are a multitude of players and factors to consider and while the current trajectory seems fairly evident, the situation could change overnight. Six months post-coup, Embassy anticipates that elections will likely be pushed into 2010 and that popular discontent may continue to manifest itself in small-scale demonstrations and labor strikes. Embassy is also concerned about the possibility of a counter-coup, which will continue to be a concern as long as this transition period lasts. Oddly enough, this trajectory is not that much different from the one we were looking at about the same time last year: delayed elections, civil unrest, and the possibility of military intervention. The main difference is that the military is now in charge, which has significantly modified our policy approach. A discussion of policy implications follows septel.
RASPOLIC